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TRACKING THE INTELLIGENCE BUDGET
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Billions for defense; not one cent for intelligence -- or so one might surmise searching through the thick volumes detailing President Reagan's \$973.7 billion fiscal 1986 budget.

Not a single statistic revealing how much is spent annually on the massive U.S. network of intelligence agencies and departments is obvious in the minutely detailed document delivered to Congress Monday.

The total figure might -- just might -- be around \$15 billion, but there is no way of proving or disproving the speculation.

The numbers are there, in the main budget book and its many separate annexes, cleverly submerged in the figures of the various branches of government, listed as general, special, contingency and emergency funds. Some may be slipped into allocations for independent agencies.

The figures are among the most tightly held in Washington because they could give the Soviet Union, or any other potential enemy, valuable clues about how U.S. intelligence is concentrating its manpower and resources.

To most Americans, U.S. intelligence means the Central Intelligence Agency. But the CIA is not even the biggest of the many parts of the government engaged in spying, detecting and analyzing what goes on around the globe.

In addition to the CIA, other major agencies involved in foreign, as distinct from domestic, intelligence include:

The National Security Agency; Defense Intelligence Agency; State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research; the Secret Service, under the Treasury Department, whose agents often go abroad to prepare for presidential visits; the National Reconnaissance Office; and Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine intelligence. And there are still others.

For the major branches, even the number of employees involved is secret. Some guesstimates:

-NSA. The largest and most secret of the "spook groups," NSA monitors foreign communications through a worldwide network of ground stations, satellites and specially equipped aircraft, ships and even submarines. It tries to break foreign codes and protect American codes and the security of U.S. communications.

James Ramford, author of an intriguingly detailed book on the NSA, "The Puzzle Palace," estimates the agency's budget as up to \$10 billion a year. The staff may be as high as 75,000 civilians and military. Most work at a security-cloaked, still-expanding series of headquarter buildings at Fort George Meade, midway between Washington and Baltimore, Md.

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-The CIA. The agency's budget could be between \$2 billion and \$4 billion -- or more. More than 20,000 people work around the clock at its headquarters, also still expanding, located in a wooded area at Langley, Va. The CIA also has sub-offices in Washington and training centers and "safe houses" throughout Virginia.

The total intelligence pricetag, after throwing in a few more billions for all the other groups, amounts to big money.

How is it accounted for? Primary oversight is maintained by the Senate and House Intelligence committees, which meet in strict privacy insured by state-of-the-art counter-spy devices. Other members of Congress generally must depend on the say-so of their colleagues on those panels that the money -- however much it is -- is being spent wisely.